

Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al-Ateeqi (Al-Atiqi): Educational Pioneer, Politician, and Muslim Reformist in Post Ottoman Arabia.

Abstract:

Abdulaziz bin (son of) Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al-Ateeqi (Al-Atiqi) (1882-1969) was an educator, an Islamic scholar, a historian, and a politician. He was also a pioneer of media and communication in the Arabian Peninsula. He grew up a traveler passionate for education and reform. He descended from an ancient noble scholarly family and held a number of political positions in Saudi Arabia and leading positions in Bahrain. As educator, he ran a number of national schools in accordance to the modern educational system which he introduced for the first time in Bahrain (1916), and in Al-Majma'ah town in Najd in the central part of the Arabian Peninsula (1931). In addition, he took head master and teaching positions in Kuwait City and the village of Fahaheel in Kuwait (1938-56). Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi lived in a critical period of history. He witnessed the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of monarch states, and the emergence of republics. These events shaped his personality as well as his intellectual and practical interests. He dreamed of bringing back the glory of the Islamic caliphate and towards that end journeyed a path of political action, education, and the media whenever he had the chance. He taught in eight schools within six cities and villages in four countries. Throughout his career, the encompassing theme was trying to reconcile reformist salafi thoughts he took up with Rashid Rida in Egypt with the puritan Wahabi Salafi doctrine.

Growing up:

Sheikh Abdulaziz Alateeqi was born in the village of Harma in the Sudair district of Najd region in 1882. He took his basic education in the neighboring village of Al-Majma'ah where he studied with well-known sheikhs such as: Abdullah bin Saif, Abdullah Al-Fakhiri, Ahmed bin Obeid and his grandfather Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ateeqi who was the judge of the Sudair province for 30 years (1868-98). He then moved to the city of Al-Zubair in southern Iraq to study under Sheikh Mohammed Al-Rabeh's supervision who was one of the most prominent scholars at Mizel Al-Sadouns's school. Sheikh Abdulaziz was then awarded a scholarship to study at the facility of "Dar Al-Dawa wa Al-Irshad" (School of preaching and Guidance) in Cairo, the first charitable school of its kind between the years 1912 and 1914. The school was under the supervision of a well-known intellectual named Mohammed Rashid Rida, and taught Shariá studies, physical and social sciences, along with healthcare and English language. The curriculum was so advanced for its time. Other intellectuals who taught at Dar Al-Dawa and were on par with Mohammed Rahid Rida were: Ahmed Effendi Al-Deek, Sayyed Taha and Dr. Mohammed Sidqi Among others.

private school in the Gulf which operated under a system of modern education. Al-Zayani later registered the school property as a charitable trust.

2. After the founding of Al-Zayani's school, he moved to Kuwait to work in the trade business, and was also giving lessons at the Mubarakiya School (2). During his time in Kuwait he went to Najd and Al-Ahsa' for the purpose of trade and exchange.

3. From 1916 to 1918, he intermittently supervised the Al-Zayani private school. He then recommended the Egyptian Sheikh living in Kuwait, Hafiz Wahba to assume its management (3).

4. He worked as a teacher and headmaster at Al-Hedaya Al-Khalifiya School which was the first publicly organized school in Bahrain (1920). There were two schools under the same name (Al-Hedaya Al-Khalifiya). One of them was in Muharraq Island (north), which was previously established by Ali Al-Zayani and then incorporated by the government, and the other one was in Manama (south) which is administered by Al-Ateeqi (4) of which hundreds of students graduated from. One of Al-Ateeqi's most prominent pupils in Bahrain was Mr. Ahmed Al-Omran: Director and Minister of Education in Bahrain from 1946 to 1972. He stresses that Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi and his colleagues were the first core of a formal education team in Bahrain.

5. From 1921 to 1924 he was the Director of Education and supervisor of the aforementioned schools in Bahrain.

In Bahrain, he fulfilled his reformist agenda to a great length. Following the department of Hafiz Wahba, Abdulaziz had a free hand from the Education Council to shape the curriculum to his progressive Islamic thoughts. Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Khalifa, deputy chairman of the council was instrumental in securing the necessary approvals (5).

South East Asia Travels:

During a period of tourism and preaching work in Southeast Asia he volunteered at Mohammed Bin Huzeim Al-Hasawi School in Penang Island in Malaysia in 1924, where he gave lessons twice a week. He then worked on spreading the Islamic thoughts in Singapore, Indonesia and India (6). In these countries he wrote several articles in different newspapers and exchanged thoughts with major political and intellectual leaders. He collaborated with Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sourakti, a leading scholar in Indonesia. In India he met with Mahatma Ghandi, Othman Khan (King of Haydar Abad), Abo AlKalam Azad, Sulaiman Al-Nadawi and others. The theme of his discussions in India and Southeast Asia was to explain the Wahabi Salafi movement in face of negative propaganda (7).

A Political life in Mecca:

He later moved to Mecca where he was appointed advisor to King Abdulaziz ibn Saud from late 1924 to July 1927. During that period, he held the following positions:

1. Member of the Committee which handed the city of Jeddah from Sharif Ali bin Hussein over to Sultan Abdulaziz ibn Saud.
2. Member of the First Advisory Council under the government of Hijaz.
3. Member of the First Shura Council under the government of Hijaz.
4. Advisor to Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz, deputy to the King in Mecca.
5. He participated in the First Islamic Conference in Mecca (June-July 1926), and was a member of the Interim Executive Committee which monitored the work of the conference (8). This committee declared a number of reforms which have received worldwide recognition (9).
6. He was appointed the acting Director of the Directorate of Foreign Affairs.
7. Appointed assistant to the Head of the Directorate of Media (Publication Department). He also wrote several articles in the Um Al-Qura Newspaper (10).
8. He chaired Shura Council in deputy to Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz during his absence in Europe (11).
9. He was envoy and head of diplomatic mission to Java (Indonesia) (12).

الاسم والشهرة	الهيئة التي ينسب اليها	المناصب
٢٧ الشيخ محمد الحليم السديني	عضو وفد جمعية العلماء الهندية	دفتر جمعية علماء هند دهل
٢٨ السيد توفيق الشريف	رئيس وفد عسير	الحجاز مكة - دار المؤتمر -
٢٩ الشيخ عبد العزيز القتيبي	عضو وفد عسير	الحجاز مكة - مستشار نائب الملك
٣٠ محمد ابراهيم	» »	دمشق - بالتفكير المصري -
٣١ السيد أمين الحسيني	رئيس فلسطين	رئيس المجلس الاسلامي الاعلى فلسطين
٣٢ هاجاج افندي توبوش	عضو » »	القدس الشريف -
٣٣ اماعيل افندي الحافظ	» »	سندوق البريد ٢٢٥ القدس
٣٤ عبد القوي عوني بك الكمكي	رئيس وفد بيروت	» » ٧١٥ »
٣٥ حسن افندي المكي محمد بن سليم	عضو » »	صاحب جريدة الشرق ورئيس الجمعية الوطنية الاسلاميه بيروت
٣٦ الشيخ عبد الرحمن سلام	» »	الحسيني امام حجة المسيطية - بيروت
٣٧ محمود منيع هارون	مندوب اللاذقية - سوريا	اللاذقية - سوريا -
٣٨ الشيخ محمد هجعت القبطار	مندوب شخصي - «	دمشق الشام - عضو المجمع العلمي العربي
		وخطيب جامع الحنظلي ومدرس بدمشق

Plate 2: A member's list of the Islamic Conference in 1926. Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi is representative from Asir district. His title is shown as "Advisor to the Deputy King". Source: Conference Proceedings, 1345AH.

In his short but busy career in Mecca, he had his hands full of duties and responsibilities following the handover from Sherif Ali bin Hussein. There he was involved in reconciliation between the local traditions and the new puritan Salafi ideas. One event recorded a potentially explosive conflict between two groups. An article appeared in the semi-official Um Al-Qura newspaper on "Al-Tawaf and Mutawwifteen" in December 3rd 1926. This is the ritual rotation around the "Kaaba", in Mecca, practiced in Hajj Pilgrimage and year round. The "Tawaf" was administered and guided for the most part by agents according to specific rituals and recitations. This practice is centuries old and had been organized as a business which renders handsome profit for the practitioners "Al-Mutawwifteen". Now when a Salafi scholar like Abdulrazzaq Hamza criticized the practice in public, the "guild" was not ready to accept such threatening remarks. They took up a noble person with them, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Shaibi, the holder of the Kaaba keys and complained to the acting governor of Mecca: Prince Mishari bin Jeluwi. Prince Mishari had instructions from the Sultan King Abdulaziz to refer all matters to two prominent advisors: Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi and Sherif Hussein Adnan (13). Prince Mishari called on Al-Ateeqi for consultation. Although the meeting details were not reported, the action of Mishari is self-explanatory. He called the protestors and gave them calming assurance (14). Eventually Hamza took up a position in a newly formed religious institute serving the same guild he criticized (15). The pattern of Al-Ateeqi's approach to change suggests that he advised Mishari to postpone reforms in Hajj practices to avoid social disruption and adopt a long term strategy based on youth education. It is to be noted that Hamza came to work from Egypt to Mecca upon a recommendation by Al-Ateeqi himself (16).

Second Education Career:

Al-Ateeqi was arrested among 5 other prominent persons from Mecca in July 1927, and imprisoned in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for undeclared reasons (17). He was later moved to Al-Ahsa prison from which hence released by the end of 1931. After his release he settled in his hometown Majma'ah. He established and managed a voluntary school in his home from 1931 to 1933 (18). There he taught religion, Arabic and basic sciences according to his modern educational vision. But this did not fare well with some hard line people who caused foreclosure of his activities. After the forced closure of the school he had little reason to stay in Saudi Arabia. Hence he requested relocation to Kuwait where he was contracted to head Al-Qibliya School (19). His career in Kuwait included the following:

1. He taught at Al-Mubarakkiyyah School for two years (1936-1937).
2. He worked in Al-Qibliyah School from 1937 to 1946 where he was teacher and headmaster.
3. He taught at Al-Ahmadiya School from 1947 to 1949 (20).
4. He worked in Fahaheel Elementary School for boys from 1949 until he retired at the end of 1955. He was the first headmaster of this school, which was later renamed Othman ibn Affan School.

5. He spent time as an unofficial educator in which he gave his children and grandchildren private lessons at home.

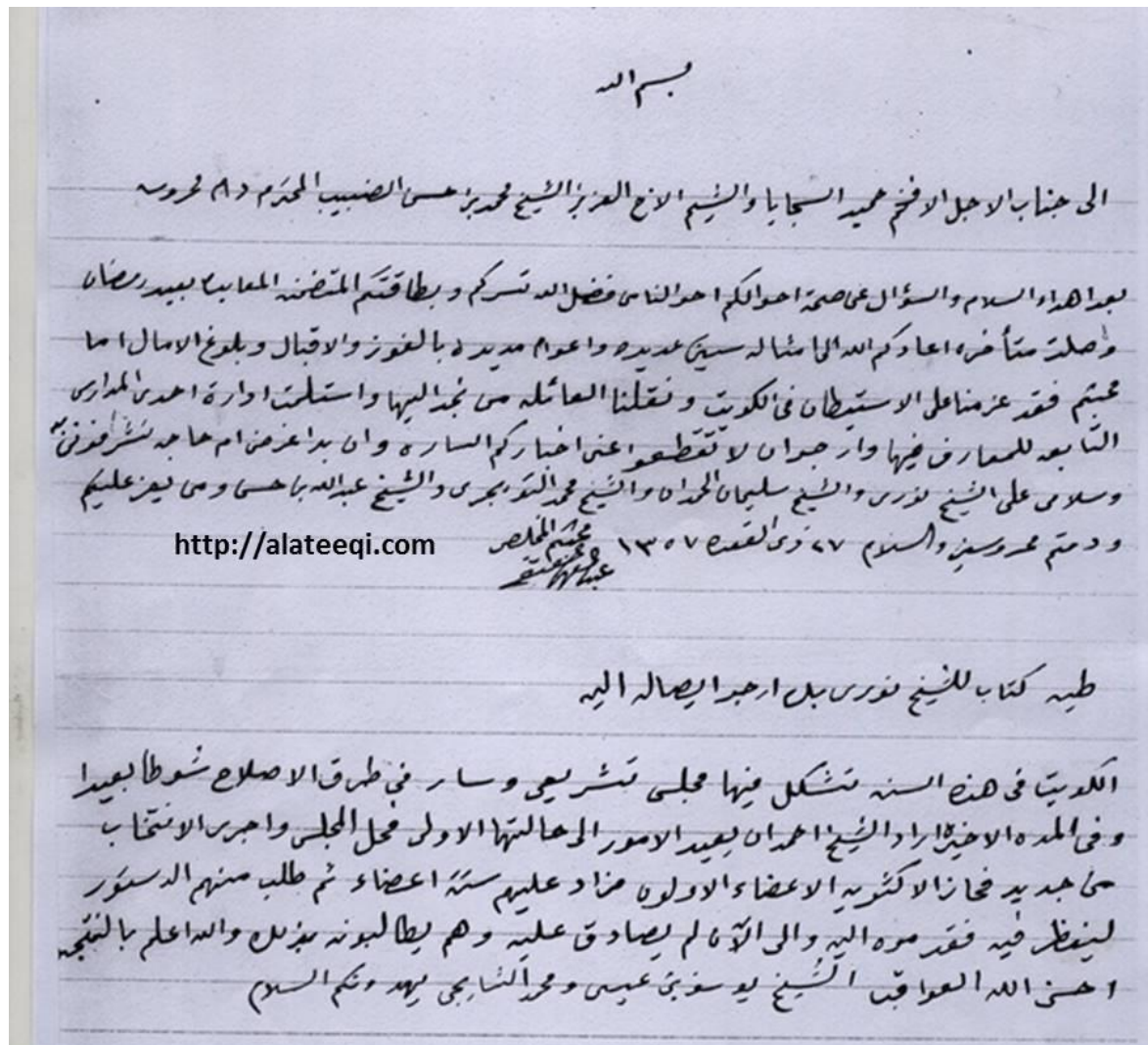


Plate 3: A letter sent from Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi in 1357AH to a friend in Mecca describing his move to Kuwait to head a public school also documented the establishment of a legislative council in Kuwait and its constitutional proposal. Source: Dr. Ahmed Al-Dhubaib.

His Vision of the Educational Goals and Objectives:

Al-Ateeqi was a visionary educator and an early promoter of educational objectives. Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi's letters have preserved his views and personal goals for undertaking education. After he was contracted as headmaster at the Al-Hedaya Al-Khalifiya School in Bahrain, he sent a letter to a friend in Al-Majma'ah clarifying his motivation for undertaking the position. These are direct quotations from his letter (21):

1. "To instill correct faith and dispel myths from the minds of children"
2. "This line of work is noble and honorable. It is also appreciated by Bahraini rulers, the Al-Khalifah family"

3. "Teaching helps me recall and gain information and knowledge"
4. "Financial fulfillment"
5. "Not being forced to deal with savages and ignorant people"

He also stated four educational objectives: "Teaching facilitation, learning speed, cognitive discipline, and ethical refinement".

These goals illuminate a sophisticated mind driven by educational passion. He explained in his letter the current curriculum for junior pupils which consisted of reading, writing, reciting the Quran, and Arithmetic.

For the senior students, curriculum, was as follows: The study of Islamic Monotheism, Jurisprudence, ethics, grammar, arithmetic, the Prophet's history (PBUH), health and fitness, science, calligraphy, recitation of the Quran and Hadith prose. However, once he was appointed headmaster he evaluated the students and decided to follow a different approach where he split the students into groups based on their abilities regardless of their age.

This diversity of goals and inclusion of mental and ethical objectives amongst educational goals was very much unparalleled in those days in Arabia. And for that matter it may be considered modern even by today's practices. This approach was present in all his educational endeavors throughout his busy career. It is clear that what he meant by "cognitive discipline" included critical thinking as this was prevalent in all his practices in Bahrain. He also had no problem with proposing alternatives and reforming the curriculum according to the student's needs and qualifications (22). Al-Ateeqi also pioneered society reach as a means for expanding student's talents. Al-Othman recalled that Al-Ateeqi used to take talented students to the nearby and newly founded Arts Club in Bahrain where they practiced Poetry and participated in Poetic and literature forums (23).

To further his quest for modern social sciences, Al-Ateeqi requested books from Egypt to be sent to the schools of Bahrain. Amongst them were fundamental sources on critical thinking and methods for social change. They were translated into Arabic and publicized by his teacher Rashid Rida and his friend Muhibb Eldin Al-Khatib. These books included:

1. The Secret for the Development of nations - 1921
2. The Spirit of Sociology - 1921
3. Introduction to Civilizations -1922

منہ سے کہی

١٩٤٢
٥ فبراير ١٩٤٢
مفتي القضاة الشيخ عبد العزيز بن محمد الشافعي
المقيم بالجوارح

[illegible]

These were all written by the French philosopher Gustave Le Bon. There is no doubt that Al-Ateeqi's inclusion of what was "useful from them" in the school curriculum and library was an attempt to refine the desired renaissance for cultural change amongst the newer generation but in accordance to the Islamic framework of values and concepts. It was a very beautiful educational combination between East and West Sciences (24).

The last school under Sheikh Abdulaziz's management was in the village of Fahaheel where a team of photographers from an Australian magazine called Cairns Post took the effort to

portray Sheikh Abdulaziz and his pupils (Feb. 1952). The editor of the magazine noted how the headmaster, Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi, gave his pupils personal attention and guidance. He also noted that the school was sophisticated. Some of the former pupils mentioned a number of his practices in the school where different types of activities were available including cultural, theatrical, sports, scouting, and music (25).

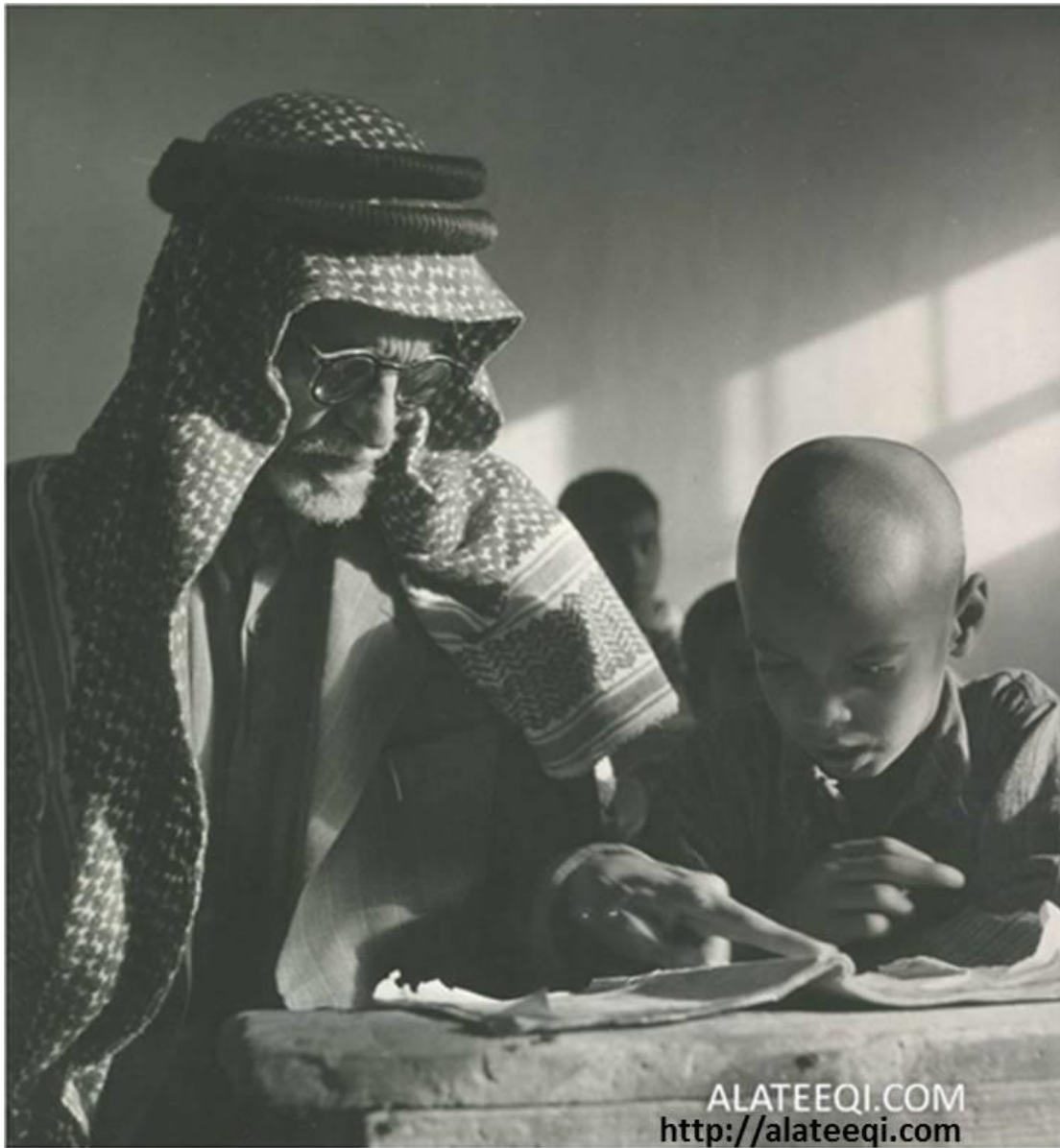


Plate 5: Al-Ateeqi's photo in a school in Kuwait. Posted in the Australian journal "Cairns Post" in 1952 (26)

Abdulrazzaq Al-Rifai, a former student in the Fahaheel School has documented the occurrence of an educational boom in the early fifties of the twentieth century, a period which Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi was the founding headmaster (1949-1955). "A period where modern education came into existence for the first time helping the school flourish: those were the student's happiest days" (27). "Celebrations take place in the spring holiday during which entertainment and literary events and theatrical activities take place and are attended by

parents and family members. This may not be considered odd today, but to introduce modern education with such activities to a village community was something new and unprecedented at its time".



Plate 6: Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi (front row, far right) reading an event program at Fahaheel School, 1965. Also shown is his son Mohammed AlAteeqi (front row, far left). Source: family records.

His Social Role

Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi was keen on raising his family members with a scientific upbringing. He began teaching his younger brothers at home after his official working hours, and his attention moved from generation after generation to his children and grandchildren. His admiration for teaching and learning reached to a point that he enrolled his eldest daughter Mouthi (Moudhi) at the "Äl Qibliya School for boys" under his supervision due to the absence of girl schools at that time (28). As headmaster, and as a father, he wanted to give his daughter the opportunity of learning at the highest of standards. Abdulaziz was so eager on training the youth of his family that when he went on a business trip from Kuwait to Majma'ah in 1918, he took his younger brother Abdulqader and another family member with him. Every one of them was riding a fully loaded camel (29).

He also served as a primary source for his family in judiciary and genealogical matters; his family and the courts upheld his testimony which was used in cases for the determination of heirs of deceased persons. His family records extending two centuries serve to preserve

knowledge of the degrees of kinship within the Al-Ateeqi (Al-Atiqi) family. He preserved and handed down family lineage and origins knowledge: the Al-Ateeqi lineage to Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq the first Caliph of Islam and the Prophet Mohammed's closest companion, who is also known as "Ateeq" (Atiq) from the tribe of Quraish. Both his son Mohammed and daughter Moudhi documented this lineage which is also held and documented by other branches of the family (30).

Al-Ateeqi's Passion for Communication:

Al-Ateeqi's greatest interest was following the ways of the righteous early generations of Muslims (the "Salaf") hoping to unite Arabs and Muslims. He was very eager to communicate with his friends in different countries such as Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Rida and Mr. Muhib Al-Deen Al-Khatib in Egypt, Sheikh Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al-Khalifah in Bahrain, Sheikh Ahmed Alsorkiti in Indonesia, and Sheikh Sulaiman Al-Hamdan, Sheikh Mohammed Suroor Al-Sabban, his father in law Sheikh Nuri bey bin Hassan Pasha and Mr. Mohammed bin Hassan Al-Dhubaib in Mecca. In Kuwait he had Sheikh Yousif bin Essa Al-Qinai', Sulaiman Al-Adsani, and his friend and cousin Salim bin Abdullah Al-Ateeqi. A number of his letters are still preserved, some of which address social and historical issues. It is worth mentioning a few of the correspondences that he communicated that documented a meticulous observation of "current" issues.

An early surviving letter that he sent to a friend in Basra documented the only insider account of the Dar Al-Dawa wa Al-Irshad school in Egypt(see plate 1). The letter was communicated to a prominent newspaper in Basra called "Al-Dustoor" which features it in the front page in 18 January 1913 (31). Later in his career he would still communicate current events and issues with his friends from Kuwait, including rare accounts of the ill fated Legislative Council that was formed during the rule of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in 1938(see plate 3). Two letters on the issue survived (32). Al-Ateeqi's interest in current events was shaped by his turbulent experience in diplomacy and politics in different parts of the post Ottoman Arabic lands. His reporting passion is also evident in his own unpublished biographical memoir in which he reported many events and experiences from Arabian and Asian countries that is commonly referred to as "Al-Ateeqi's history".

His Legacy

Perhaps the most important achievement of Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi is the introduction of modern education in the Gulf region which justifies why he was described as "a pioneer of modern education in the Gulf region" (33) (34). The Sciences and ideologies he transferred and shared with the thousands of students and friends in various Arab and Islamic countries such as Hijaz, Najd, Bahrain, Kuwait, India, Indonesia and the Malay (Malaysia) influenced them as they reached the highest positions in their countries as well as enriched the intellectual, social, economic and political life in these countries. Of those who were influenced and educated by Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi: Mr. Ahmed Al-Omran and Mr. Rashid Al-Zayani in Bahrain, Sheikh Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al-Hajji, Mr. Othman bin Nasser Al-Saleh, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Rabiah, in Saudi Arabia. In addition he taught Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah (former Amir of Kuwait from 1977 to 2006),

Sheikh Saad Al-Abullah Al-Sabah (former Crown Prince and temporary Amir of Kuwait in 2006), HE Abdulrahman Salim Al-Ateeqi (former Minister of Oil and Minister of Finance and current Advisor to the Amir of Kuwait), Mr. Khaled Ahmed Al-Jassar, Mr. Rashed Al-Rashed and Dr. Yaqoub Yousif Al-Ghanim in Kuwait, and many others. Furthermore, his time as advisor and deputy to the Deputy ruler of Hijaz and Mecca at the time the young King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud surely influenced the character of the young prince.

Few of his literary contributions are known, but many others are not. He wrote several articles in Um Al-Qura Journal in Mecca (1925), one of which was dedicated to criticizing the deposed government of Sherif of Jeddah (35). He wrote multiple speeches, one of which was on behalf of Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz who later became King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. This was his first official speech in Mecca in 28 Jumada Al-Akhir 1344AH (January 13th 1926). He also reviewed the translation of Mahatma Ghandhi's book "The Health" for his friend, a translator, Mr. Abdulrazaq Al-Malih Abadi.



Plate 7: An article written by Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi in 1925 signed as an eyewitness criticizing Sherif Ali's Government. Source: Um Al-Qura Newspaper 1344AH (1926AD)

A later article he wrote in Kuwait was dedicated to nationalization of the education labor force and training of teachers, a subject still an issue in the general sense. This article appeared in the Kuwaiti Al-Bi'tha Journal (February 1949) (36). It appears from the journal that Alateeqi was a respected figure among the educated elite of the time. In an interview of a group of university students studying in Egypt about their impressions from Kuwait, one of them "Ahmed Mishari Al-Adwani" quoted Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi as having delivered a most impressive advice, saying: "Kuwait is in need for action, so tell your brothers to act without looking at the time" (37). His message implies that one should not expect the result

of his action to materialise immediately but allows for unknown time delay. This statement could not have come without deep personal experience such as his own. Another former student from his last school in Al-Fahaheel village mentioned an interesting practice of the headmaster Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi. In one occasion Sheikh Al-Ateeqi suffered a foot injury due to an accident and could not attend to school. So did he take medical leave or rest? On the contrary, he moved his class home and students took the subject in his home class! (38) That is another story that involves deep appreciation of action and time relationship.

His Passing

Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mohamed Al-Ateeqi died at the age of eighty-eight. He died on "Ashura" the tenth day of Muharram 1389AH (March 28th 1969). He had a son Mohammed and two daughters Moudhi and Noura from his first wife Ifakat Nouri Bey bin Hassan Pasha, and one daughter Omayya from his second wife Suad Abdulrahman Ramadan.

The Kuwaiti Government has honored Abdulaziz Al-Ateeqi by naming a school after him in the city of Sulaibikhat.

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Acknowledgement : We appreciate the gentlemen who supplied us with copies of some records and documents used in this study as referenced below. We are especially thankful to Darat Al-Malik Abdulaziz in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for facilitation given from their archive.

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